

ON TRACK WITH MDT

It used to be road construction was a sure sign of summer, but Montana's mild winter has allowed the construction season to kick off to an early start.

One thing that remains on schedule, though, is National Work Zone Awareness Week. This year it is April 3-9. This week is used to call attention to the dangers of driving in work zones and the importance of safe driving practices to avoid these dangers. It also brings to the attention of the motoring public and the media the fact that nearly 900 men, women and children are killed senselessly in work zones each year.



For most of us, knowing that fines double in Montana's work zones is enough to get us to slow down. Here are some more tips to follow when driving through a work zone.

1. Stay alert. Dedicate your full attention to the roadway.
2. Pay close attention. Signs and work zone flaggers save lives.
3. Turn on your headlights. Workers and other motorists must see you.
4. Don't tailgate.
5. Don't speed. Note the posted speed limits in and around the work zone.
6. Keep up with the traffic flow.
7. Don't change lanes in the work zone.
8. Minimize distractions. Avoid changing radio stations and using mobile phones while driving in a work zone.
9. Expect the unexpected. Keep an eye out for workers and their equipment.
10. Be patient. Remember that construction crews are working to improve your future ride.

These practices are easy to remember. All I usually need is a few minutes in the car with my teen driver and I find myself reciting them to her.

Even when it appears a work zone is not active, it's important to follow these driving tips and observe the posted precautions. What may look like a sign that has been forgotten is likely there because of an unseen hazard. This could be anything from an abrupt edge to a road surface not finished for travel at the normally posted speed. It's safer to follow the sign's warnings and slow down than to make any assumption of whether the sign should be there or not.

In 2004, 255 crashes took place in construction zones in Montana. Those crashes resulted in 157 fatalities and injuries. Nationwide, four out of five people killed in work zones are drivers or passengers, not workers.

Work Zone Awareness is an important issue. The Montana Contractors Association, Montana Highway Patrol, Laborers AGC – Training Program, Federal Highway Administration, Local Technical Assistance Program, Institute of Transportation Engineers, Western Transportation Institute and other organizations around the state and around the nation are joining forces to spread the word and improve safety in work zones.

It will help make safer those who travel through work zones and those who work in work zones. Please help spread the word about the importance of work zone safety, and remember,

Drive slow. Think fast whenever you're approaching or traveling through a work zone.

Serving you with pride,
Jim Lynch
Director